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ABSTRACT

Through Project Learning through Industry and Volunteer Educators (Project LIVE), the Children's Aid Society has been addressing problems of literacy and school dropout in an educational partnership between junior high schools in New York City and a number of major corporations. LIVE brings together junior high school students (grades 7 and 8) who are below grade level and matches them with volunteer tutors from participating corporations under the umbrella of a social-service agency. Students are bused from school to the tutors' places of business and back to school. This arrangement allows students to experience the business environment as well as to receive help. Recent research has indicated that the dropout rate for adolescents in the general population is three times that of Project LIVE students. In the 1987 evaluation, 118 students and 109 current tutors completed surveys about the project's impact on the dropout rate, college enrollment, employment rates, and the program's attractiveness to students. In all these areas, Project LIVE was rated an overwhelming success. Sixty-two percent of students thought they might have dropped out without Project LIVE, and 4 of 5 students actually did complete high school, with 52 percent going on for further education. Students were enthusiastic about the project, and considered that it improved their employment potentials. (SLD)

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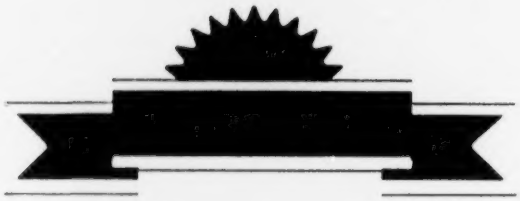

PROJECT

LIVE

A literacy and dropout prevention program that works.

EVALUATION STUDY

UDC 29819

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The Children's Aid Society gives warm thanks to the three people who undertook the research and writing of this evaluation report: Walter V. Collier D.P.A., Carole Burstein, and Martha Cameron.
We feel that this informal evaluation adds immeasurably to the credibility of Project LIVE.

Philip Coltoff
Executive Director
The Children's Aid Society

PROJECT LIVE: AN EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP THAT WORKS

Consider the likely fate of a child who, as early as seventh or eighth grade, has already fallen two or three years behind in reading or math. The child reads haltingly and clumsily, probably not even well enough to decipher a simple grocery list. The addition on a cash register tape is beyond his or her ability to calculate. School grows increasingly unpleasant. The child becomes shy or aggressive, clownish or embarrassed, stubborn or apathetic. One day the child simply vanishes -- another school drop-out -- another one of hundreds of thousands headed for an adulthood of barely minimal literacy and even less opportunity.

If only one child were to drop out of school in a year, we might say that was his or her personal misfortunate. When millions of children drop out of school each year, it is a social tragedy of monumental, indeed incalculable, proportions. How do we assign a value to wasted human resources or lost human potential? How do we measure this loss to our whole community?

The personal and social problems of school drop-outs will not go away by themselves. While individual drop-outs may disappear from sight -- languishing in jail, dying of drug overdoses, or simply going off into the night -- social problems caused, or made worse, by dropping out: crime, delinquency, aimlessness, poverty, unemployment -- will not fade away by themselves.

The problem of illiteracy and drop-outs is a serious one and must be addressed by people who are not only serious about trying to alleviate it, but who are in a position to dedicate their time, energy, attention, intelligence, and resources to find ways to deal with the devastation it causes in our society.

Through Project LIVE (Learning through Industry and Volunteer Educators) The Children's Aid Society has been tackling, for the past 14 years, problems of literacy and school drop-outs in an educational partnership with junior high schools in New York City and major corporations such as: AT&T, Avon Products,

CBS Magazines, Equitable Life, Gulf & Western, Manufacturers Hanover, Morgan Guaranty, New York Telephone, Reader's Digest, Time Inc., and even the New York State Governor's Office of Employee Relations. LIVE brings together: Junior High School 7th and 8th graders who are two to three years below grade level in reading, volunteer employee tutors of participating corporations, and a social service agency. All of these organizations have combined their resources and talents to work on behalf of youngsters who might otherwise leave school early and suffer as a consequence, the social and economic disasters so often associated with dropping out.

Achievement, success, motivation, career goals, and pursuit of higher education are not ideas we generally associate with poor minority kids who are behind in reading and math skills, but the participants in Project LIVE have changed all that.

Since 1972, managers, secretaries, business analysts, attorneys, salespersons, media producers, editors, and computer specialists have been volunteering two hours of their time one afternoon a week to tutor 7th and 8th graders who are potential school drop-outs.

The students, who read an average of two to three years below grade level, come from junior high schools located principally in New York City; they are bussed to the volunteer tutors' place of business from their schools and back one day a week.

Volunteer tutors concentrate on improving students' reading abilities, increasing their self-confidence, strengthening their motivation to succeed in school, and encouraging them to think constructively about their future. Since tutoring takes place where the volunteers work, the junior high schoolers have the advantage of being exposed to a business environment -- a completely new and fascinating experience for most of them.

The volunteer tutors get great satisfaction from working with children. Participation in the program raises their estimation of themselves and their estimation of their company. Interest in the problems of children, and pleasure derived from being of genuine service to another human being, make the volunteers want to continue tutoring so that they can help even more youngsters.

Volunteer tutors are fully supported in their efforts by the agencies and companies for which they work. The companies provide the tutoring facilities, give their employees one hour of released time to participate in the program, and provide financial support for essential aspects of the program. Those essential aspects are: transportation costs; snacks for the students; on-site tutoring library; and the salary for the liaison teacher who accompanies the students to the corporate site, and who works in close consultation with the Project LIVE staff.

The Children's Aid Society sponsors and manages Project LIVE. It provides the organizational and educational support for the program, and makes all of the vast services offered by the Society available to the students and their families. The Children's Aid Society's Educational Advisors, all of whom are former junior high school teachers, provide group and individual training sessions throughout the school year. They also select and prepare tutoring materials which are designed particularly for the Project.

For 14 years Project LIVE has brought people together who want to improve reading, study, and survival skills of potential drop-outs; enrich students' experience through exposure to the larger community; strengthen students' confidence in their ability to succeed in school and in life; create confidence in the adult world.

After 14 years, as shown by a recent evaluation study, Project LIVE has made a significant impact on the lives of students who very likely would have dropped out of school: the drop-out rate for adolescents in the general population is three times that for Project LIVE students.

Project LIVE, through the joint efforts of all its participants, improves reading skills, deters drop-outs, and motivates students for success.

The Evaluations Study:

This year 118 students who were in the program between 1978 and 1981, and 109 employees who are currently tutors, responded to a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate Project LIVE's influence in terms of the school drop-out rate; the number of students who go on to college; the employment rate; the degree of help given with reading problems; adequacy of the tutors; and the program's attractiveness to students. In all these areas, Project LIVE was rated an overwhelming success. For example:

The drop-out rate: 62% of the students who responded said that if not for Project LIVE they would probably have left high school before finishing. The drop-out rate for adolescents in the general population is three times that for Project LIVE students. The remaining 38% said that although they would probably have stayed in school, the Project significantly enhanced their learning abilities.

The number of students who go on to college, technical or vocational training to pursue a career: 4 out of 5 of the Project LIVE students who responded graduated from high school. 52% of them continued their education: 28% went on to college; 24% went to technical or vocational schools. Among the colleges they attended were Brandeis, Brooklyn College, Cornell, Florida State College, Fordham University, Hunter College, Long Island University, Manhattan Community College, New York University, Pace, Southern Connecticut State College, SUNY Buffalo, Virginia State College. The technical and vocational schools they attended included the Fashion Institute of Technology, the New York City Police Academy, and New York Institute of Technology.

The employment rate: 52% of the graduates who are not in college or other schools are employed full time. 41% of the students who attend college or other schools work part-time.

Help with reading problems while in school, and longer-term benefits: Most progress was reported by students in these areas; reading; desire to get ahead in life; motivation to work harder in school; facility with mathematics; increased ability to talk to adults. Exposure to a business environment proved extremely beneficial to students who especially valued having the nature of jobs explained to them; meeting other workers and learning about their jobs; gaining familiarity with company equipment and operation. Students felt that they learned to think more concretely about future careers, absorbed basic business communication skills, and became sensitive to interpersonal habits necessary for good working relations with others such as; getting along with people, cooperation, proper attire, showing up for work, punctuality, and solving disagreements peacefully.

Program's attractiveness to students: The students were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about having participated in the program: they found it enjoyable, were pleased with its educational benefits, like the exposure to work, and appreciated the opportunity to have a concerned adult with whom to speak. They eagerly recommended the program to other students, as evidenced by their remarks:

> ... "Project LIVE taught me that someone else gives a damn ... My tutor gave me the confidence to stay in school ..."
>
> "The Project made it a lot easier for me to do better in school, because of the tremendous help I got in reading."
>
> " I hope that more companies become involved, so that more young students get the same break as I did."
>
> "I'm in the top one-third of the senior class. I'm also in an honors class, and last summer I successfully completed a selected program of applied economics."
>
> "Project LIVE helped me very much. I was encouraged and given confidence to go on and finish school."

"I learned a lot at the company I couldn't learn in school."

Because of Project LIVE, hundreds of young people who might be hanging out on street corners or sitting in jail are planning careers in business, engineering, computers, medicine, teaching, law, law enforcement, armed services, commercial art, and auto mechanics. They are not idly dreaming; they have acquired the educational skills, self-confidence, and motivation to make a success of their lives.

Generous corporate sponsors, dedicated volunteer tutors, cooperative junior high schools, hard-working students -- all collaborating under the direction of The Children's Aid Society -- share credit for the notable successes of Project LIVE, an educational partnership that works.